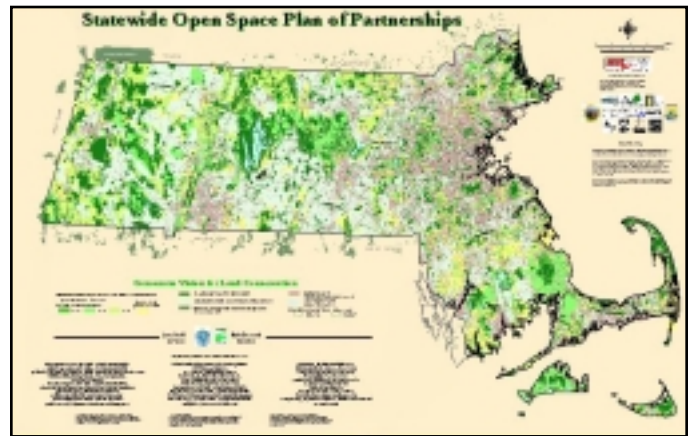


An Open Space Plan for Massachusetts—Partnerships in Action

Pulling Together Land Conservation Partners for Protection of Biodiversity, Water Resources, Working Farms and Forests, and Outdoor Recreation

In 2001, Secretary Durand and the EOEA land staff teamed up with nonprofit partners to develop a Statewide Open Space Plan that would guide land conservation partnerships. The Plan identifies the areas of statewide and regional significance where three or more organizations or agencies are involved in protecting open space. Over the past 18 months, the volunteer task force of 33 persons from Massachusetts land trusts, conservation commissions, watershed associations, state and federal natural resource agencies, and regional planning agencies has been working to locate the most important open spaces needed to protect a connected network of water resources, core habitats, working farms and forests, and outdoor recreation areas.

This effort is unique in the U.S. because it incorporates both existing technical information on these resources from studies like BioMap Core Habitats, Zone II well protection sites, prime agricultural soils and matrix forests, and the State Greenways Plan, as well as priority sites that have been identified by statewide and regional conservation organizations because several different resources exist on the site. This effort combined priority lands from 30 statewide and regional plans. It also was guided by a review of 30 municipal open space plans representing the most innovative efforts for urban, suburban and rural communities. Finally, the plan received in depth input from municipal officials and recreational user groups at five public meetings held across the state.



Why are partnerships necessary?

Secretary Durand has stressed the necessity of organizations and agencies working together if we are to leave a legacy of conservation land that can maintain the community character and quality of life we now enjoy in Massachusetts. On large land projects, Secretary Durand has successfully pushed for many three-way partnerships, often with a goal of the state shouldering one third of the cost matched by one third from the town(s) and one third from non-profit organizations. The Open-Space Plan for Massachusetts will greatly facilitate these partnerships in the protection of tens of thousands of critical lands across the state. Recent successful examples of this partnership approach include the Wendell Property on Massachusetts' North Shore; Mt. Watatic, the last large unprotected summit in the center of our state; and Santuit Pond, the largest parcel of private undeveloped land left on Cape Cod.



Future Conservation Priority – Town of Douglas



Future Conservation Priority
Town of Florida

What is the goal for land conservation in the plan?

The Statewide Open Space Plan maps 1.5 million acres of open space land. This acreage represents about half of the available land in the state (land that is not already developed or protected). Of this mapped area, approximately 1 million acres has been classified as “developable” by the buildout analyses done by EOEA for Massachusetts’ 351 cities and towns, and is therefore at risk of being lost. Employing a partnership approach, state, federal, and municipal governments, private land trusts and other conservation organizations, and private landowners will apply a variety of land conservation “tools” - including conservation restrictions, protective overlays and conservation zoning, gifts, cluster development, and outright purchase to conserve these lands. The goal is to conserve 1 million acres over the next 20 years, before they are lost to development, so that Massachusetts will truly have an open space network that protects its future water supply, core biodiversity habitats, economically viable working farms and forests, and outdoor recreation areas for all generations. This goal builds on the previous work of the state and its partners published in the 1998 report “*A View from Borderland*” that recommended protecting three acres for every one developed.



Future Conservation Priority – Town of Essex



Future Conservation Priority – Town of Deerfield

What are the benefits to implementing the Open Space Plan?

The development that occurred on more than 150,000 acres of land in Massachusetts during the 1990s covered about 3% of the state. However, the environmental impact of this development has magnified its fragmentation of large habitat areas, encroachment on important aquifer areas, fragmentation of blocks of economically viable agriculture and forestland and blocking of public access to the coast, river banks, and lake shores. Many of the important natural resource areas mapped by the Open Space Plan represents our last chance to protect habitat areas for rare and endangered species and protect sole source aquifers' surface water supplies. We need sustainable growth, economically viable blocks of working farms and forests, and access to lakes and rivers that will be valued by future generations.

By linking local open spaces to the statewide and regionally significant areas, we create trail and wildlife corridors that connect our neighborhoods to these important areas. In the process, cities and towns will assure reasonable future tax rates, as many studies link lower tax rates with adequate areas of protected open space. By proactively protecting these critical areas and channeling development to other areas, we can have strong economic development while protecting our valued open space. Due to the nature of development, it is likely that half of the remaining land in Massachusetts will be protected in the end. Over the next 20 years, we can choose the half that will protect our water supplies, rare species, working farms and forests, and best outdoor recreation sites, or we can let the choice be made for us and have our remaining open space lost.

The vision of the Open Space Plan is that the 44 acres per day of development will occur away from natural resources of local, regional, and statewide significance and that in 20 years one million acres of the most developable and regionally significant natural resources will be protected by a range of land conservation techniques.



Future Conservation Priority
Town of Carver

How will the Open Space Plan be used?

EOEA and its conservation partners will put the extensive map analysis that created the Statewide Open Space Plan (the final map and the 50 individual organization and resource maps) on their web sites, making it available to conservation organizations and local communities to facilitate partnerships to protect these significant resources. Local communities can also use the map analysis to help in completing local Open-Space Plans, as they can have access to all available mapping of statewide and regional priority areas for water resources, biodiversity, working farms and forests, and outdoor recreation sites. The State Open Space Plan will also be useful in helping neighboring communities to work together on land conservation.

What are the priorities for the land not mapped in the plan?

The Open Space Plan for Massachusetts shows an overlap of three or more data and partner interests and identifies significant statewide or regional natural resources. The 1.3 million acres that are not mapped (and not currently developed or protected) may be areas that are priorities for individual communities to conserve, or they may be areas that are very appropriate for thoughtful development. The Open Space Plan shows communities where their local conservation priorities may link with potential regional or statewide wildlife corridors, trails or large conservation areas. These currently unmapped areas could also be places where future research identifies natural resources of statewide or regional significance. Of the 1.3 million unmapped acres, EOEA's buildout analyses show that 1.2 million acres are developable. If this 1.2 million acres were all developed, it would double the currently developed land area that supports our current state population of six million people.



Future Conservation Priority – Town of Peru

An Open Space Plan for Massachusetts – Partnerships in Action

Here is what the Open Space Plan does:

1. Identifies areas where three or more partners (land trusts, state, federal, etc.) are currently focusing their land conservation work.
2. Identifies on one map the most critical land for water resources (key aquifer and surface water protection areas), biodiversity (Core BioMap areas), working farms and forests (prime agricultural soils, Nature Conservancy, and DEM priority forest areas) and outdoor recreation (AMC and DEM's Mass Connections regional trails and greenways, 60 priority lakes, and miles of rivers).

Here is how local communities can use the plan:

1. Identify where several land conservation partners are focusing on the same land in your community so groups can work together.
2. Identify resources of statewide and regional significance for local Open Space Plans.
3. Link priority local open spaces to a system of statewide and regional open spaces and greenways.
4. Use the Plan to review over 30 individual conservation plans from statewide and regional organizations as well as key maps of important resources.

Here are the recommendations of the Open Space Plan:

1. All partners work to protect 1.5 million acres – of the remaining available 3 million acres – over the next 20 years using the whole conservation “tool box” including conservation zoning, cluster development, gifts of land and conservation restrictions, and purchase of land and conservation restrictions.
2. Focus on protecting the one million acres where three conservation partners agree on protection and the land is classified by the build-outs as “developable”.
3. Incorporate all our existing land protection goals for biodiversity, water supply, working farms and forest, and outdoor recreation into one partnership effort.

Here are the recommendations for the areas not mapped in the State Open Space Plan (1.3 million acres not mapped by the partners as land of statewide or regional conservation significance):

1. Local communities and conservation partners work to link local land priorities to the statewide Open Space network.
2. Local communities foster appropriate development in concert with water supply, biodiversity, working farms and forests, and outdoor recreation.
3. Partners and local communities advocate for assistance where new natural resources of statewide or regional significance are found.
4. The vision of the Open Space Plan is that the 44 acres per day of development will occur away from natural resources of local, regional, and statewide significance and that in 20 years one million acres of the most developable and regionally significant natural resources will be protected by a range of land conservation techniques.

How You Can Help

Increasing costs of land acquisition and competing demands on state resources challenge us as we strive to continue to acquire the many additional properties that need our protection. EOEA's strong tradition of land protection would not be possible without the generous contributions of environmentally minded citizens who give land, sell land at less than full market value, or donate money towards land acquisition and stewardship initiatives. We welcome you to join us and help us to reach our next conservation milestone by making a contribution to the trusts described at right:

DEM's Conservation Trust

DEM's Conservation Trust was established in 1990 as a way for citizens to contribute to the recreational and conservation interests of the Commonwealth. Your contribution to DEM's Conservation Trust will help DEM attain its goal of acquiring ecologically critical parcels of land and promoting recreational opportunities for the public. Donations are also needed for the perpetual care and stewardship of these valuable assets. Contributions are tax deductible and can be designated for particular parks or programs of the donor's choice.

For more information on how you can be a steward of the Commonwealth's lands through a contribution to DEM's Conservation Trust, contact Sharon Hoey, at 617-626-1267.

MDC's Metropolitan Parks Trust Fund

The Metropolitan Parks Trust Fund was established to accept tax-deductible contributions to the MDC Parks Program. Donations large and small help protect open space, assist MDC's management staff in their conservation efforts, and provide public programs like the annual Independence Day celebration at the Hatch Shell.

For more information on the Metropolitan Parks Trust Fund, please contact the MDC, at (617) 727-5228, Extension 400.

